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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001478

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/A, S/CT, EUR/RPM
NSC FOR O'SULLIVAN/HARRIMAN/AMEND
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
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SUBJECT: WARDAK-HILLEN MEETING: ANA IS IMPROVING, ISAF
EXPANSION PLANS ON TRACK

KABUL 00001478 001.4 OF 003

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ANGUS SIMMONS, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) A
ND (D)

1. (C) Summary. Minister of Defense Wardak said the quality of the ANA is improving and he welcomes recent Coalition planning for joint operations. In a March 20 discussion with visiting Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs

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John Hillen, Minister Wardak said that as the ANA gradually builds its ability to provide security for Afghanistan, the Coalition will be able to step back to a supporting role. He said that although he had initially been concerned about ISAF extending its role in the South and East, he was satisfied that the dual-hatted role of the U.S. operational commander would ensure that security needs are met. A/S Hillen noted that the Canadians and the British will certainly step up to their responsibilities in the South, and the Dutch are military prepared for the fight, although their political system is risk-averse. Regarding Pakistan, Minister Wardak emphasized the need for confidence building measures. He said that he was aware of the proposal, raised by A/S Hillen, for the ANA to join in the air assault exercise *Inspired Gambit* in early May, but did not say whether the ANA would in fact participate. Finally, Minister Wardak thanked the U.S. delegation for the recent visit of President Bush to Afghanistan, saying it brought home to the Afghan people that the United States has made a long-term commitment to this country. End summary.

12. (C) Minister Wardak described the relationship between U.S. forces and the ANA as a joint venture, joint success.⁸ He said that as the ANA gradually takes over physical security, the Coalition will be able to step back to a supporting/mentoring role. He said he had recently been briefed on the Coalition's spring offensive, which represents a new partnership with the ANA that will help the ANA mature. He said that we are starting to see good results from the implementation of the new policy of fewer kandaks in training and increased emphasis on quality. However, he said the ANA is still short of combat enablers) it is unable to operate independently due to lack of fire and air support capability. The Minister said he is very sensitive to the need for sustainability, but that conversely, being fully enabled would allow the ANA to protect itself without having to rely on continued US presence over the long term. OSC-A Commander MG Durbin said that there is an open dialogue on this subject. The U.S. military appreciates that the ANA needs tactical and operational mobility. He said that OSC-A is considering the possibility of providing aircraft beyond Presidential airlift requirements, as well as developing high-end infantry and special operations capabilities.

ISAF Expansion

13. (C) With regard to ISAF expansion, the Minister said that he had originally been worried, but he has since been reassured by the concept of the dual-hatted U.S. command, which will have capability to operate around the country. He said he didn't anticipate a problem in the South since the British and the Canadians are ready for the job. A/S Hillen

KABUL 00001478 002.4 OF 003

noted that while the Dutch are ready militarily, their political system is risk averse. Still, they made the right decision in honoring their commitment to come to Uruzgan. A/S Hillen noted that once people get into a fight it binds them together.

Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

14. (C) Regarding Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan, the Minister said that he was skeptical of the Tripartite Commission. He said the meetings are frequent, but so far they have been cosmetic rather than practical. He said the Pakistanis have to realize that they and Afghanistan have a common enemy. A/S Hillen said he had just come from Pakistan, where Embassy Islamabad told him they had seen an attitude shift within the GOP. He said the Pakistanis are getting more aggressive with their own operations, and are making new attempts at cooperation. He noted that the Pakistan Army had invited ANA participation in an air assault exercise later this spring, and said he hoped the ANA would agree to attend. Wardak said the ANA had received the invitation and was considering it. (Note: A few days after this meeting, the GOA agreed to send an ANA platoon to the exercise, &Inspired Gambit.⁸ End note.)

15. (C) Minister Wardak emphasized the need for confidence-building measures with Pakistan. He proposed a joint task force, so that if the GOA hears of a terrorist sanctuary it can share that information with the GOP.

Other Regional Issues

¶6. (C) Regarding recent developments in the U.S.-India relationship, Wardak said that the Pakistanis were worried, and that worry could be used for leverage, within limits. He said that in his view the U.S. relationship with India should be of major significance. A/S Hillen commented that South Asian international relations is no longer a zero-sum game: President Bush has been the first to dehyphenate the Indo-Pak relationship and pursue improved relations with both countries for their own sakes and on their own terms.

¶7. (C) On Iran, Wardak warned that while the Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry is still trying to have good relations with Afghanistan, the Revolutionary Guard and intelligence services are involved in everything here. He said that intelligence suggests these entities are linking up with the Taliban, and may also be working with the Russians in pursuit of regional goals.

¶8. (C) Finally, Minister Wardak expressed the gratitude of the Afghan people for President Bush's recent visit. Noting that it was only the second time in 50 years that a U.S. president has visited Afghanistan, he said that it showed the U.S. commitment to the region. He said that in the meeting he attended, it was clear that President Bush was speaking from the heart, and that was very much appreciated here.

¶9. (U) This cable has been cleared by A/S Hillen.

KABUL 00001478 003.4 OF 003

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